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ABSTRACT

In order to ascertain how well Essex County College (ECC) prepared its transfer students for upper-division academic coursework at transfer institutions, students who transferred to four-year institutions in the terms beginning January 1974 and September 1974 were surveyed. Responses were received from 413 students. Among the findings were: (1) 64% of the respondents reported their transfer coursework was harder or much harder than their coursework had been at ECC; (2) 21% indicated they were having difficulty in reading, 28% in writing, and 29% in mathematics; (3) 39% felt that individual counseling would have helped them perform better at their transfer institution; (4) 88% felt ECC had prepared them adequately or very well for their present studies; (5) 8% felt ECC had prepared them inadequately or very poorly for their present studies; and (6) mean grade point averages of transfer students from ECC declined by .65 points. In light of some indication that students were having academic difficulty at their transfer college, it was recommended that a college-wide review of academic standards for graduation be conducted and that more transfer counseling should be performed. (JDS)

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ESSEX COUNTY COLLEGE'S

ACADEMIC PREPARATION

Transfer Students' Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this research effort was to review the opinion Essex County College transfer students had of their academic preparation at ECC. A secondary purpose was to compare the academic performance of students at ECC with their academic performance at their transfer institution. Of the sample of 413 students responding to the "Graduate, Early Transfer and Withdrawal Follow-Up Questionnaire 1973-74" some 88% indicated that, overall, ECC prepared them very well or adequately for their transfer studies. Some 51% indicated their current coursework at their transfer college was much harder or harder than their coursework at ECC. The actual overall GPA's of a separate ECC transfer sample of 347 students decreased an average of .65 grade points at their transfer institution. A need to compare the samples in this study with a sample of transfer students from other New Jersey junior colleges was recommended. More transfer counseling was also recommended.

INTRODUCTION

The Student Affairs Area at Essex County College is interested in the academic performance of its students at their transfer college as well as how adequately Essex County College has prepared them for advanced academic work. The purpose of this report is to examine data which will give some indication as to the academic performance of ECC transfer students. The reader should be advised that, at the present time, a major study is being prepared by the Counseling and Career Development Center which will include an examination of the academic performance of transfer students. In the meantime, however, we believe it is important to preview how ECC students felt they were prepared for future academic work as well as review their actual academic performance.

In order to ascertain the above, responses that transfer students gave to the Counseling and Career Development Center questionnaire distributed in the summer of 1975 will be analyzed. The title of this questionnaire is "Graduate, Early Transfer and Withdrawal Follow-Up Questionnaire 1973-74." This questionnaire was sent to students who transferred to four-year institutions for the terms beginning January 1974 or September 1974. The responses

of 413 transfer students to four questions on this questionnaire composes the basis for this report. In addition to this group of students, the actual academic performance of some transfer students will be reviewed. Specifically, the academic performance of samples of students attending Rutgers University College of Arts and Science and the University College in Newark, Kean College, Seton Hall University and Jersey City State College will be reported.

The four questions extracted from the questionnaire are (1) How do your present academic courses compare to ECC courses? (2) Overall, how well did ECC prepare you for your present studies? (3) In your opinion, what areas should ECC have provided additional services that would have helped you perform better at your present college? (4) How much difficulty, if any, are you having in the pursuit of your present studies in the following areas: reading, writing, study skills, mathematics and verbal. The responses the transfer students gave to each of these questions are presented in this report in terms of frequency (N) and percent (%).

RESULTS

The questions mentioned above are presented in tables below. In all cases, the question is listed followed by the possible choices with the appropriate frequency (N) and percent (%). A discussion of the implications of this data can be found in the Implications section of this report.

TABLE I

Question: How do your present academic courses compare to ECC courses:

	N	%
Much Harder	77	18.64
Harder	189	45.76
Same	115	27.84
Easier	6	1.45
Much Easier	2	.48
No Response	24	5.83
	413	

From the above question, it should be noted that some 64% of our students reported that their present academic courses were much harder or harder than were courses at ECC. Approximately 2% of our students reported that the coursework was easier or much easier. If one can assume from the above that the coursework in which our students are involved is harder, it is logical to ask in which areas are they having difficulty. The data presented in Table II

attempts to answer this question.

TABLE II

Question: How much difficulty, if any, are you having in the pursuit of your present studies in the following areas:

	Response (N) = 413									
	A Great Deal		Some		Little		None At All		No Response	
AREA	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)
Reading	4.60	(19)	16.95	(70)	16.71	(69)	50.60	(209)	11.14	(46)
Writing	5.81	(24)	22.03	(91)	21.79	(90)	40.68	(168)	9.69	(40)
Mathematics	9.68	(40)	19.13	(79)	20.82	(86)	33.17	(137)	17.20	(71)
Verbal	4.60	(19)	15.74	(65)	19.37	(80)	47.70	(197)	12.59	(52)
Study Skills	6.29	(26)	19.13	(79)	25.67	(106)	37.05	(153)	11.86	(49)

In order to interpret the data in Table II, it is necessary to first examine it as presented for each area. With regard to reading, it is evident that 21% indicated they were having a great deal or some difficulty in reading. Some 50% indicated they had no difficulty at all with reading. With regard to writing, approximately 28% indicated they had a problem, whereas 40% indicated they had no difficulty at all. This same trend is noted in mathematics with approximately 29% indicating that they had a great deal or some difficulty with mathematics.

Similarly, with reference to verbal skills and study skills it should be noted that approximately 20% and 25% respectively reported having a great

deal or some difficulty in these areas. Whereas, with regard to verbal skills, approximately 48% reported having no difficulty and with regard to study skills, approximately 37% reported having no difficulty.

It is evident from the above data that when ECC students were asked to indicate specifically if they had any trouble in reading, writing, mathematics, verbal skills or study skills, only 20-29 percent responded that they had a great deal or some difficulty in these areas. This is noteworthy as 64% of our students reported that their present academic courses at their transfer college were much harder or harder than their coursework at ECC. It is obvious that the area in which they are having trouble cannot be pinpointed.

In other words, from the data above, no one area seems to be a key area of need for a majority of these students. This fact is somewhat supported by the data presented in Table III. In Table III, the responses the students gave to the question, "In your opinion, what areas should ECC have provided additional services that would have helped you perform better at your present college?"

TABLE III

Question: In your opinion, what areas should ECC have provided additional services that would have helped you perform better at your present college?

	N	%
Tutorial Services	47	11.38
Individual Counseling	160	38.74
Career Planning	108	26.15
Develop Study Skills	110	26.63
Develop Test Taking Skills	106	25.67
Transfer Orientation	79	19.13
Other	7	1.69

In examining the data in Table III, it should be pointed out that the percents will not total 100% as students could indicate one or more areas. In general, the data in Table III is self-explanatory. It is perhaps most important to note that the area in which most FCC students requested additional services was in individual counseling. Here, approximately 39% of the students responding to this question indicated that they felt individual counseling would have helped them perform better at their present college.

The data in Table IV indicates overall how well ECC prepared our students for their present studies.

TABLE IV

Question: Overall, how well did ECC prepare you for your present studies?

	N	%
Very Well	122	29.54
Adequately	241	58.35
Inadequately	27	6.54
Very Poorly	4	.97
No Response	19	4.60
	413	

It is intriguing to note that approximately 88% of the students responding to this questionnaire indicated that ECC prepared them very well or adequately for their present studies! This seems to be contradictory to the data presented in Table I where approximately 64% of these same students indicated that their present studies were much harder to harder than their coursework at ECC. In order to examine this seemingly contradictory statement further, the students' responses to the question "Overall, how well did ECC prepare you for your present studies?" is directly compared with their response to the question

"How do your present academic courses compare to ECC courses?" In other words, the responses of 122 students who reported that ECC prepared them very well for their present studies were examined to see what proportion felt the courses were much harder, harder, the same, easier or much easier than ECC courses. This analysis was completed for the 241 students who reported that ECC prepared them adequately and for 31 students who reported that ECC prepared them inadequately or very poorly. The resultant data is presented in Table V.

TABLE V

Comparison of ECC preparation and current level of difficulty

Of those who reported ECC prepared them very well (N = 122)

	N	%
Much Harder	14	11.47
Harder	48	39.34
Same	50	40.98
Easier	4	3.28
Much Easier	1	.82
No Response	5	4.11
	122	

Of those who reported ECC prepared them adequately (N = 241)

	N	%
Much Harder	47	19.50
Harder	126	52.28
Same	61	25.31
Easier	1	.41
Much Easier	1	.41
No Response	5	2.09
	241	

Of those who reported ECC prepared them inadequately or very poorly (N = 31)

	N	%
Much Harder	14	45.16
Harder	12	38.71
Same	2	6.45
Easier	1	3.22
Much Easier	0	0
No Response	2	6.46
	31	

The results in Table V are self-explanatory. For example, of the 122 students who indicated ECC prepared them very well for their present studies, 14 (11.47%) students found their current coursework much harder, 48 (39.4%) students found their current coursework harder, 50 (40.98%) students round their current coursework the same level of difficulty, 4 (3.28%) students found their coursework easier and only one student (.82%) found the coursework much easier. Thus, while at first glance it may appear that there is a discrepancy between how well our students said they were prepared and the current level of difficulty with coursework, an overall analysis of the data seems to indicate that the discrepancy is not as serious as one may initially think. For example, of those students who indicated ECC prepared them very well, 50.82% indicated their current coursework at their transfer college was much harder or harder than their coursework at ECC. Whereas, for those students who indicated ECC prepared them adequately, 71.78% indicated their current coursework was much harder or harder than their coursework at ECC. And, finally, for those students who indicated ECC prepared them inadequately or very poorly, 83.87% indicated their current coursework was much harder or harder than their coursework at ECC.

Finally, as mentioned in the Introduction, the actual academic performance of samples of those students attending five four-year colleges in New Jersey is reviewed in Table VI. It is most important to note here that although most of the students began their transfer studies in January 1974 or September 1974, the students are not the same as those discussed earlier since grades are reported to our transfer counselor directly by the transfer

college. Often, the student for whom the college has a transfer GPA may not have completed ECC's transfer questionnaire. Therefore, for example, it is not known how many of the 164 students attending Rutgers (Newark) completed the questionnaire from which the data in Tables I thru V is reported. Thus, the sample in Table VI must be considered a separate sample.

TABLE VI

Transfer Institution	N	Mean ECC GPA	Mean Transfer GPA
Rutgers-Newark	164	2.91	2.00
Kean College	59	2.76	2.18
Seton Hall	51	2.90	2.34
Jersey City State	49	2.55	2.23
University College (Rutgers)	24	2.55	1.68

The data in Table VI indicates the number (N) attending various transfer institutions for whom overall GPA's are reported. In addition to the mean transfer GPA, the mean ECC GPA is also reported for the same N. This allows the reader to evaluate how well these particular students did academically at ECC in their academic performance at the transfer institution. It should be noted that for all institutions the mean GPA at the transfer college is lower than the mean ECC GPA for the same sample of students. The decrease ranged from a high of .91 grade points (Rutgers-Newark) to a low of .32 grade points (Jersey City State) with a mean decrease for all institutions of .65. This will be discussed further in the Implications section.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There can be little doubt from the data presented in Table I that a majority of our students find their academic courses at their transfer college more difficult than their ECC coursework. This fact is further reflected by the data in Table VI which indicates that the overall mean GPA at five transfer institutions is lower than the overall mean GPA for these same students at ECC. This does not indicate that on an individual basis all student GPA's decreased. Indeed, in some cases some of our students had a higher overall GPA at their transfer institution. However, for all institutions the overall mean GPA of ECC students dropped .65 points. Again, this does not indicate that the mean GPA of all ECC students will drop .65 points. Nevertheless, when considered on an institutional basis it is probable that our transfer students will not do as well academically at their transfer institution as they did at ECC.

Before the reader becomes overly critical of Essex County College's academic preparation, the following should be considered. First, upper level courses are, by design, more difficult than freshmen and sophomore level courses. Second, the attention given junior college students is usually more personal than that given to them by the faculty at most four-year

institutions. As a result, one would generally expect that the GPA of transfer students would decrease. Unfortunately, at the writing of this report, no statewide data was available for comparison. Nevertheless, in the opinion of this author, this drop in GPA may become a major concern of our faculty. However, because no comparative data was available from other two-year colleges regarding the change in GPA of their transfer students, this data must be carefully interpreted. In other words, the change in GPA of transfer students from other junior colleges must be compared with the GPA change of our transfer students. Statewide efforts are now being made to assure that this type of data will be available for next year's report. Until that data becomes available no definite conclusions concerning the necessity to review the academic preparation of our transfer students is warranted.

In any case, the recommendation of the Student Affairs Research Office's Student Characteristic Report 1974-75 to "Develop appropriate tools to insure that graduates possess the ability to read, think analytically, communicate in writing and verbally; to utilize basic mathematical processes; to comprehend basic scientific and technological processes" must be a constant concern. In the light of the data presented in Table I and Table VI there seems to be some indication that our transfer students are having academic difficulty at their transfer college. It may be important that the college more carefully assess the basic abilities of our students before recommending them for graduation. Specifically, research may need to be conducted to establish whether or not a policy recommending proficiency examinations in English and

mathematics be established. Most important in this research effort will be the statewide data mentioned above.

Even though there is evidence that the academic performance of ECC students decreases at the transfer college, the data in Table IV seems to indicate that the students feel that ECC prepared them very well or adequately according to the indications of 89% of respondents in the transfer study. As mentioned earlier, this discrepancy between academic preparation as seen by the student and perceived academic difficulty is further examined in Table V (sub-group analysis of ECC preparation and current level of difficulty). That is, there is a relationship between the perceived academic preparation at ECC and the perceived level of difficulty at their transfer college. More specifically, those students who indicated ECC prepared them very well were less likely to report that their transfer course-work was much harder or harder at their transfer college (Table V). This may indicate that students who felt ECC did not prepare them adequately may be identified, and indeed should be identified, before they transfer. In other words, if one were to ask prospective transfer students beginning their second semester sophomore year if they felt they were being adequately prepared academically and psychologically for transfer college, one may find that some students would feel they were not being adequately prepared. According to the data in Table IV one could expect as many as 8% could be identified inasmuch as 8% of ECC's transfer students indicated ECC prepared them inadequately or very poorly for their transfer studies. Of course, the assumption here would be that the students would have some idea as to the

type of preparation they were receiving at ECC, when in fact it may be impossible for students to have a realistic idea as to the type of preparation they were receiving at ECC for transfer work prior to actually experiencing academic courses at a transfer institution. Nevertheless, it is this author's opinion that an effort should be made to seek out students who are academically uncertain and psychologically insecure about their future in a transfer college. If identified, these students could then avail themselves of appropriate tutoring and guidance. In order for this recommendation to be implemented, a procedure needs to be established which would allow ECC's transfer office to "keep track" of our transfer students. Transfer students should see a transfer counselor (one counselor may not be sufficient) one semester before transferring. Special transfer orientation groups would prepare students for the academic and psychological changes with which they will be confronted at their transfer college.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this report has been to evaluate data which will give concerned faculty and administrators some indication as to the academic performance and needs of ECC's transfer students. Self-reported data was collected from the responses of 413 transfer students who completed the "Graduate, Early Transfer and Withdrawal Follow-Up Questionnaire 1973-74." The questions reviewed sought information regarding the student's perception of ECC's academic preparation as well as their recommendations for additional services which they felt ECC should provide. In addition to the questionnaire responses, a comparison was made between ECC overall grade point average and transfer college overall grade point average of a separate sample of students who transferred to Rutgers University College of Arts and Sciences and the University College in Newark, Kean College, Seton Hall and Jersey City State. For ease in reading and summary purposes the data in Tables I thru VI is summarized and itemized below:

1. Approximately 64% of the 413 students who responded to the questionnaire reported that their present academic courses were much harder or harder than their coursework at ECC. Only 2% reported that the coursework was easier or much easier.

2. Some 21% indicated they were having a great deal or some

difficulty in reading.

3. Some 28% indicated they were having a great deal or some difficulty in writing.

4. Some 29% indicated they were having a great deal or some difficulty in mathematics.

5. Some 20% indicated they were having a great deal or some difficulty in verbal skills.

6. Some 25% indicated they were having a great deal or some difficulty in developing good study habits.

7. Approximately 39% of the students who responded to the questionnaire indicated that they felt ECC should have provided more individual counseling in order to perform better at their transfer institution.

8. Some 26% indicated that they felt ECC should have helped them in career planning and study skills development.

9. Approximately 88% of the students felt that, overall, ECC prepared them very well or adequately for their present studies.

10. Of those students who indicated ECC prepared them very well for their transfer studies, 51% indicated their current coursework at their transfer college was much harder or harder than their coursework at ECC.

11. Of those students who indicated ECC prepared them adequately for their transfer studies, 72% indicated their current coursework at their transfer college was much harder or harder than their coursework at ECC.

12. Of those students who indicated ECC prepared them inadequately or very poorly for their transfer studies, 84% indicated their current coursework at their transfer college was much harder or harder than their coursework at ECC.

13. The data summarized in conclusions 10, 11 and 12 above indicate that there is a slight discrepancy between the amount of preparation our students felt they received and the current level of difficulty they seem to be having with advanced academic work.

14. The overall mean GPA's of ECC students at their transfer institu-

tion decreased from their overall mean GPA at ECC. The decrease ranged from .32 grade points for Jersey City State to .91 for Rutgers-Newark. The mean decrease for all institutions was .65.

In conclusion, there are many important recommendations which can be made from the data in this report. Perhaps the most important is the rather traditional recommendation that additional research be conducted. The purpose of this research should be to gather data which would relate the students' perceptions of ECC with their actual performance. In other words, in next year's study, the sample reported in Tables I-V (date reported from the transfer questionnaire) should be the same sample as the data reported in Table VI (data collected from transfer institutions). Procedures to implement this recommendation are in the planning stage.

In another area, a college-wide review of ECC's academic standards for graduation needs to be conducted. In light of the fact that overall GPA for ECC transfer students decrease at their transfer institution, there may be some need for a proficiency examination in the basic skills areas of English and mathematics. Also, supporting this recommendation is the fact that 64% of the 413 students who responded to the transfer questionnaire reported that their present academic courses were much harder or harder than their coursework at ECC (only 2% reported that the coursework was easier).

Finally more transfer counseling appears to be necessary. This is based on the fact that a majority of our students found their transfer work more difficult and that 39% of the transfer students suggested that more individual counseling be provided and 20% requested transfer orientation.

It appears that one transfer counselor cannot handle the transfer paperwork and provide appropriate transfer counseling.

Research efforts on this year's transfer students has already begun. Hopefully, more questions and concerns will be resolved. In the meantime, it remains a major responsibility of the Student Affairs Area and the college in general to assist our transfer students in every way possible.

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